

CARNOUSTIE GOLF CLUB

At a recent event the members of Carnoustie Golf Club knew they were in for a spellbinding talk when they saw the US Open and the US Metropolitan Open Trophies on the table next to our speaker, David Alan Mackesey.

In his youth this American gentleman was more used to running around golf courses than actually playing on them. His journey from the challenges of cross country running to researching the history of the Diablo Golf and Country Club and the fledgling days of American golf, had fifty plus knowledgeable Carnoustie golfers captivated for more than 90minutes.

David wasn't always interested in golf and he became the Wisconsin Inter Scholastic Champion in 1973. After graduation David joined the wine industry and became President of the third largest wine company in the world. David retired and moved to Diablo Country Club where his interest in the heritage of golf started. In 2011 he recalls saying to his wife, "The history of golf associated with this club is fascinating, someone needs to tell this story so I am going to write a book." Her reply was simply, "You seldom read a book- how are you possibly going to write one?"

Not to be deterred, David went ahead and spent the next three years compiling the history of Diablo Golf and Country Club, work which culminated in a book entitled, *From Country Estate to Country Club, the History of Diablo Country Club*, celebrating Diablo's 100th anniversary in 2014. David recalls how he first got involved "I missed a club council meeting and, as not unknown in golf clubs, in my absence I was proposed and seconded as historian to the club. When you get involved in such a project it becomes a part of your life and becomes a family member. We are all members of a greater golfing family and custodians of the heritage and artifacts associated with this amazing story."

It was during his research on this book that David first encountered the Smith family.

A metamorphosis over took this quiet American as he began, with a passion to tell the story of the 100 year plus links between Carnoustie Golf Club and the Smith family, not just in Diablo where father John was based, but in the wider American game. The influence of the Smith family and the influx of talented Scots Golfers to North America played a huge part in developing what is now the USPGA. His in- depth knowledge of the Smith family and the early years of golf in America was quite incredible.

David revealed how he travelled with wife Lynda to Scotland and was, and still is, greatly helped in his research by Trevor Williamson, a grandson of the Simpson family, who were instrumental in the development of young golfers and club makers in Carnoustie.

Without reference to any notes David delivered a factual account covering forty years of the Carnoustie/Smith story beginning in 1898 with Alex Smith heading for America to be shortly followed by brother Willie. Both were protégés of Robert Simpson, who was hired by the Dalhousie Golf Club as professional, club maker and curator of the Carnoustie Links. Both competed in the US Open Championship that year. Alex finished second and Willie finished fifth.

Willie Smith won the US Open Championship 1899 by 11 strokes, a record that would stand for over a century.

The same year brother George went to America . Then in 1908, John Smith, his wife and their two youngest sons, Jim and Macdonald, travelled to the San Francisco Bay, and settled at Claremont Country Club from Carnoustie, joining middle brother George.

In 1914, John and his wife Joann came to Diablo, a newly formed country club. John built the course and it is still much as we see it today. The club gave John a cottage within the grounds to live in which still stands to this day.

Of the many anecdotes David told us, there was one where John, aged eighty, asked the club captain if he could have a month's holiday to go and see Macdonald compete in the first Open Championship to be hosted at Carnoustie in 1931. The captain looked stunned and said that he would get back to him. The captain approached the club secretary, saying, "I thought that John Smith knew he was retired?" "So did I," came, the reply. John was granted his holiday and then formally retired. The club continued to pay John a pension, and he lived in the cottage as a gift, as a show of appreciation, until his death.

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David recalled that part of his research involved a trip to *Ed-Zell* as (pronounced in that gentle American accent) where John Smith had been employed as green keeper. The handwritten entry at the club council meeting reads:

1. *Sacked John Smith*
2. *Agreed to buy another horse*

David's response, Steve Jobs of Apple was sacked once too!

The uniqueness of David's delivery and knowledge was evident in revealing the poignant details of the Smith family. It was not all winning medals, but like all families, they had their share of tragedy, from Willie losing his life in the war in Mexico, to Alex becoming a widower in 1908. They were multi-skilled, not only playing golf at championship level but at club making, green keeping and teaching. Alex, a World Golf Hall of Fame inductee, also taught fellow inductees Jerry Travers and Glenna Collett the game. Alex placed his brother in law, Stewart Maiden, at Eastlake, who then taught Bobby Jones introducing him to the infamous "*Carnoustie Swing*". In 1908, Alex published a new York Times best selling book, entitled, *Lessons in Golf*. They were the modern day superstars and made a lot of money, but knew how to spend it as well. Macdonald battled with drink until the age of 32, and was saved by the love of his life, his bride in 1922, Louise.

While all five of John's sons competed at a championship level, and two were among the first 12 golfers inducted into the PGA Hall of Fame. They never forgot their roots and visited Carnoustie regularly. Both Alex and Macdonald's medals were brought back in a suitcase by the family and presented to the Carnoustie Golf Club after their respective deaths in 1930 and 1949. All the Smith medals in the Carnoustie trophy case at one time or another, spent time at Diablo with Mom and Dad, before their final journey here to Carnoustie.

They were a close knit family. Four were buried in Barry Cemetery near Carnoustie facing the golf course, and four in the Alamo Cemetery near Diablo facing east towards Diablo and Carnoustie.

Photos abounded as the Trophies were viewed and passed around, revealing the Smith brother's names etched in copperplate beside greats like Ben Hogan, Bobby Jones, Arnold Palmer and Jack Nicklaus.

David ended the remarkable evening by pledging to return later in the year. The members of Carnoustie Golf Club look forward to David's return and the next chapter in this incredible 100-year-plus story.

Richard Jennings

Vice Captain